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AN ANALYSIS OF HOW PARENTS INFLUENCE DEVIANT BEHAVIOR AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this literature review is to analyze the effect the family has on an adolescent's behavior. It is believed that parents have direct and indirect control. Previous research has found that parents directly influence their children's behavior through the parenting techniques utilized. Parental support is the largest influence on creating preferable behavior in adolescents. Along with the direct influence from parents, the parents have indirect control over the community through which the adolescents lives in and socializes with peers in. Adolescents require strong bonds in their community. Through these bonds, adolescents are watched over and other families reciprocate the actions. When these conditions are not provided an up-rise in juvenile crime may overtake the community. Adolescents learn greatly from their peers. The family has an indirect control over peers through community watch and their parenting techniques; teaching the child not to succumb to peer pressure. This information is vital due to the presence of juveniles in the criminal justice system.

INTRODUCTION

The first and most influential figures in one's life is the parent. Since family is the primary social interaction among children, parents are the first to form, or hinder their child's self-esteem; they create rules and an environment for their child to be classically conditioned through; and parents also mold their child's view on relationships (Engel, 2006).

Parents have such a significant impact on an individual's development that they have the extraordinary power, sometimes used intentionally, for their children to become anything the parents wish; based on the parents' pattern of behavior and children's physical and emotional attachment to their parents, children can develop healthily and become self-motivating; however, children also can become maladaptive and even destructive to themselves and/or others. Hirschi (1983) stated, 'Criminologists become interested in people only after they have committed criminal acts, and then it is too late to learn much about the family situation, especially during the child-rearing years.

As a result, many theories of criminal behavior ignore the family and thus do not explain specific problems in child rearing that may be associated with a likelihood of later deviant behavior' (Katz; Dunham; Zimmerman, 1997). Increased attention shall be focused towards the prevention of children becoming deviant, particularly during adolescence, once they have been exposed to an unhealthy child-rearing environment.

ADOLESCENTS DEVIANT BEHAVIOR

Deviant behavior can be seen in various forms regardless of age or gender. In this research, deviant behavior is stated as any behavior which does not conform to the norms, immoral and unacceptable as adolescents conduct. Various negative behavior which is seen as deviating and unacceptable to society is assumed as deviant behavior, from the simplest form as playing truant, disobeying teachers, to the more serious ones such as unrestrained socialization between the different sexes which leads to problems such as sexual promiscuity, underage prostitution, running away from home and abandoning babies. Other examples are housebreaking, drug abuse, stealing, alcoholism, physical aggression and vandalism (Regoli & Hewitt, 1991). This phenomena may be caused by repressed dissatisfaction, desire to vindicate, etcetera.

According to The Disciplinary Report 2001, Student Affairs Department, Ministry of Education, criminal offences committed by students include gambling, stealing, disobeying teachers and prefects, extortion, bullying, secret societies, drug abuse, carrying dangerous weapons, sexual harassment, threatening, trespassing, drug dealing, and open mass gambling.

Statistics provided by the Welfare Department shows that in 2003, a total of 4998 juvenile cases were reported. In 2004, this has risen to 6056 cases. This increment shows that the phenomena of deviant behavior among adolescents are worsening and certainly, this causes great worry to all parties.

Research done by Huizinga and Elliot (1985) on 950 adolescent students revealed that about 75 percent had been involved in deviant behavior at sometime, and almost a third of them are serious offences. Research also showed that anti social behaviors in adolescents are carried through adulthood (Farrington, 1989; Fergusson, et al., 1996).

Dryfoos (1990) in his research on adolescents deviant and delinquent, stated that there are four categories of high risk adolescents within 10 years to 17 years of age. Ten percent of the total are very high risk adolescent, who are involved in serious crime such as robbery, rape, house breaking, drug abuse and murder.

Fifteen percent represent high risk adolescents, involved in less serious offences such as free sexual relations, watching phonographic videos, quarrelling, physical attacks, taking alcoholic drinks, illegal gambling, illegal motor vehicle race, and the like. Twenty five percent of them are medium risk adolescents, involved in light offences such as playing truant, vandalism, stealing, smoking, disobeying teachers and parents and the like. The remaining fifty percent are low risk adolescents, who are not involved in deviant behaviour and not easily influenced by negative elements.

FAMILY ROLE

A parent is a model towards their children. Research on modeling has shown that when parents are held in high esteem and are the main sources for reinforcement, they child is more likely to

model them (Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, and Conger 1991). If a parent acts in a negative way, the child is more likely to follow their parent's negative attitude. They are also more likely to generalize this attitude to the rest of society.

Thus, parents have much influence over their child's behavior. From birth, a parent will mold and shape behaviors suitable to the norms of society through childrearing. However, there are certain parenting techniques that have a greater impact on a child's behaviors. The largest is parental support (Barnes et al 2006).

Parental support is behaviors toward the child, such as praising, encouraging, and giving affection. They show the child that he or she is valued and loved. In multiple studies, it has been found that support from parents bonds the adolescent to institutions and builds their self-control (Barnes et al 2006). This building of self-control will hinder deviant behaviors from forming.

HOW TO PREVENT DEVIANT BEHAVIORS

To prevent deviant behaviors from appearing, parents must use effective discipline, monitoring, and problem solving techniques (Crosswhite and Kerpelman 2008). Effective discipline is recognizing deviant behaviors and keeping track of when they occur. Consistent discipline must be insured at the sighting of these behaviors in order to prevent the development. However, overly harsh punishments will not stop the behavior; it will enhance it (Simons et al 1991).

The child may view the punishment as unfair and unjust and this can cause them to act out. Monitoring involves the awareness of where their child is, who their friends are, and what they do in their free time. In a study performed by Barnes et al in 2006, it was found that monitoring is a strong predictor for adolescent's deviant behavior, after peer deviance was controlled for. This illustrates how important parents are in a child's life and how their involvement can make a difference in deviant behavior. Problem solving skills are important in a child's development of communication (Crosswhite and Kerpelman 2008).

CONCLUSION

Parents directly and indirectly affect their adolescent's deviant behaviors. From the enlarging crime rates to the rise in secure detention facilities, juvenile crime is increasing. Three factors have been found that have the ability to aid in decreasing these rates. These factors are the adolescent family, community, and peers, with an overall factor of parenting. Parents directly influence deviant behavior in their children through their parenting techniques and the family structure. Effective monitoring and support, as well as consistent punishments are vital to raising a child. When these areas are lacking an adolescent is more likely to turn to deviant behavior.

Parents directly affect family structure. Divorces are a large transition and they cause adolescents to experience a low level of parental attachment and supervision, thus leading toward deviant behaviors. Once a divorce is finalized, a child will then move to living in a single-parent home. Single-parent living environments reduce social control and lead to an increase in delinquency.

A parent indirectly influences deviant behavior through a community. A single-parent community holds a greater number of opportunities to take part in deviant behaviors. Part of a child's community is their school. A parent will teach values to their children that are accepted in school. When these values are not taught, an adolescent's school bond is broken, causing their academic performance to suffer.

Without a strong bond to school, an adolescent will begin to associate with deviant peers. Deviant friends pressure the adolescent to begin or continue partaking in deviant actions. The underlying theme of social control theory and social disorganization theory further explains parents and juvenile deviant behaviors. When a child has a weak bond with their parents or the community, their self-control is decreased and social disorganization results.

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